

# MYTHS MATTER

In the classroom or at the Zoo, students can explore some of the world's most common animal myths while investigating the fact or fiction behind the mystery.

**Grade Level**  
3-8

**Theme:**  
Conservation  
Adaptations

**Curriculum  
Connections:**  
S, A

**Materials:**  
Animal Myth  
Cards  
Myth Matters  
Worksheet

Animals do some pretty strange things. Giraffes clean their eyes and ears with their tongues. Snakes see through their eyelids. Some snails can hibernate for three years. But other weird animal tales are simply myth! Separate fact from fiction in this activity.

## Charade Escapades

- 1) Allow your class to assemble into pairs and give each pair an Animal Myth Card (page 2). Each card contains the name of an animal, a true fact about that animal, a common myth about that animal and summary information. Explain that each person in a pair will select one of the numbered statements to act out for the class in a game of charades. *For older students, instruct them to give an impromptu speech that persuades the class of the validity of their statement.*
- 2) After allowing each group to take a few minutes to think through their role, permit students to begin the charades/speech activity. Remind students that they can tell the class the name of their animal, but otherwise cannot use words or writing during the activity. Each pair must act out their statements (one after the other) until the class determines the statement or until 1 minute has expired.
- 3) After both statements about the animal have been correctly determined or revealed, allow the class to vote on which statement they believe is factual. Following the votes, the pair must share with the class the correct answer and the summary information found on their Animal Myth Card.

## @ the Zoo

Now that the class has investigated myths about many of the Zoo's charismatic creatures, invite them to explore the Zoo for more fun facts about wild animals. Divide students into groups of four to five members. Each group will be responsible for finding one unique fact about five animals at the Zoo. Students should look for information that isn't well-known and record their findings on the Myths Matter worksheet (page 3).

## Back in the Classroom

Allow student groups to create imaginative "myths" that correspond with each of the five true statements they found at the Zoo (the more believable the better). Groups will then select two of those pairings to use in a second student-created game of charades. Groups compete to see who can correctly determine the most fact from fiction!

# MYTHS MATTER CARDS

## Polar Bear

- 1) F - Polar bears have white fur.
- 2) T - Polar bears have black skin.

Polar bears actually have clear and hollow fur which makes it look white in the sun. Their black skin helps attract heat in the Arctic.

## Red Wolf

- 1) F - Wolves howl at the moon.
- 2) T - Wolves help control the deer population.

Wolves do not howl at the moon, they howl to one another in their territory. Wolves are really important top predators because they impede a population explosion of deer.

## Vampire Bat

- 1) F - Vampire bats are blind.
- 2) T - Vampire bats lap up blood.

All bats can see to some level, although they commonly rely on echolocation for navigation. Despite beliefs to the contrary, vampire bats do not suck blood, but lick it from a fresh wound.

## Chimpanzee

- 1) F - Chimpanzees are herbivores.
- 2) T - Chimpanzees are omnivores.

Although chimpanzees do eat a lot of fruits and other vegetation, they also eat meat, sometimes killing wild pigs, forest antelope, or monkeys.

## Green Tree Frog

- 1) F - Touching a frog might give you warts.
- 2) T - Frogs swallow with their eyes.

Warts are caused by a human virus, and not frogs or toads. But they do use their eyes to swallow. Blinking pushes the frog's huge eyeballs down on top of its mouth, thus helping to squeeze food into the throat.

## Black Bear

- 1) F - Black bears can't climb trees.
- 2) T - Black bears are very timid creatures.

Black bears are excellent climbers, with agile bodies that can quickly climb trees to escape danger. Although black bears have a reputation as being aggressive, they are actually quite timid and usually keep to themselves.

## African Elephant

- 1) F - Elephants are afraid of mice.
- 2) T - Elephants use their ears for cooling.

Elephants are so large they would hardly even notice a mouse, much less be afraid of one. Although one would think elephants use their ears primarily for hearing, they also use them to cool their body temperature.

## Ostrich

- 1) F - Ostriches bury their heads in the sand.
- 2) T - Ostriches can run up to 45 mph.

Even though ostriches may dig around in the dirt for food, they do not bury their heads. Instead, when they are afraid, they can run very fast - up to 45 miles per hour in some cases.

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## Myths Matter Worksheet

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Gather into your group, and together, find one unique fact about five animals at the Zoo. Be sure to look for information that isn't well-known or that you don't believe most people will know. Record your findings on the worksheet below. Back at school, get together with your group and create imaginary myths that correspond with each of the true facts you found. Select two of these pairs to use in a competitive game of charades with your class. Who is the ultimate fact from fiction detective?

Animal	Unique True Fact	Creative Fictional Myth